

Kirra Vanzetti

From: MICHAEL WHITE [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 9:03 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire Services Reform

To the Honorable Committee members of the Fire Services Reform,

I have been a professional Firefighter with the MFB for the past twenty years, I have spent much of that time in the eastern fire stations such as Nunawading, Ringwood, Croydon and Templestowe and as such frequently respond with many CFA permanent and volunteer stations such as South Warrandyte, Warrandyte, Chirnside Park, Wonga Park, Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Montrose, The Basin, Bayswater and Boronia to name a few.

Whilst I have great respect for the work that volunteer Firefighters do and their level of commitment I firmly believe that in today's modern world the CFA ask's too much of them.

When the CFA was first established, the volunteer system was designed for small rural towns that had no professional fire service and was primarily for grass and bush fires that threatened the town.

This system worked very well but over time Melbourne has expanded so much that it has swallowed up those little country towns and turned them into suburbs housing millions of people with a vast amount of commercial and industrial infrastructure, large hospitals, shopping malls, schools and nursing homes, etc. Protecting these people and assets with volunteers and not a dedicated, 24 hour professional fire service is ludicrous and antiquated.

I have responded many times with the volunteers where they have failed to respond at all, or the truck has arrived on scene with only one or two crew members, the crew that have arrived are not qualified to operate the pump, or wear Breathing Apparatus, or carry out an internal fire attack, I have seen volunteers respond in their private vehicles (which is illegal) hoping that another volunteer would go to the station to get the fire truck. I am aware that volunteers have stopped fighting a large fire in Ringwood and removed their turnout gear and hidden it in their cars when it was announced that the building contained Asbestos, this was because the CFA only issues volunteers with one set of turnout gear (not three sets like professional firefighters) and all turnout gear that is contaminated with Asbestos must remain on scene and be taken away for decontamination and if that happened the volunteers would be unable to turnout.

I am currently stationed at Nunawading with the Heavy Rescue, and have sat in the station and watched as a volunteer crew in Templestowe who were attending a car accident with a casualty trapped in the vehicle responded the CFA rescue from Dandenong, this is because volunteer stations write their own assignment rules and can dictate exactly which appliances they wish to respond. The professional fire services assignment rules dictate that the closest available appliance will be responded regardless of which badge is on the door. The Heavy Rescue appliance's run with a crew of two and have no firefighting capabilities, they are purely for rescue purposes, yet just last week our rescue was called to a car accident in Bayswater with volunteers from Bayswater CFA, although Bayswater responded via radio, they were unable to attend due to not having a qualified driver and the crew and truck never left the station. The Rescue crew had to ask for a pumper from Ringwood to attend.

There are so many times that the public and professional firefighters have been let down and put in danger by the Volunteer system, if the public new the truth about how inadequate the volunteer system is there would be a public outcry, especially as how the public in volunteer areas pay the same and sometimes more through the Fire Services Levy than those protected by a professional 24 hour fire service. The Volunteers do not take part in the Emergency Medical Response program which has been a huge success and saved many lives, they also do not offer a Fire Education program, every prep and grade six student in a Victorian

school covered by professional's receives a visit from firefighters who teach them about fire safety, MFB and CFA professionals have a Fire Investigation unit, a dangerous goods department, a building services department, just to name a few, these departments work with the public and the Government to help make Victoria safer. An example of this is the Lacrosse fire in Docklands where the MFB's fire investigation unit discovered that the cladding on the outside of the building did not meet Australian standards. These are all services that is not offered to the public with the volunteer system.

One argument that has been thrown around in the media lately is 'Surge Capacity', I was at the Hazelwood mine fire, initially a lot of volunteer's were there, they came from all over the state, as the days turned into weeks the volunteer numbers dropped off remarkably and the work was left up to professional firefighters, the reason for this was explained to us by a volunteer and was obvious once pointed out, they all have to go back to work sooner or later, most volunteers can organise a few days off work here and there but cannot take too much time away from their paying careers, they have bills to pay and while most employers are understanding they have businesses to run and cannot afford to have employees off for too long. So I do not place too much weight on the argument that the volunteer system has very good surge capacity at large incidents which will be lost if the MFB and CFA professionals combine.

I would like to explain once again that I have nothing against volunteer firefighters personally, I have met many dedicated volunteers that act professionally and are very skilled in the role of firefighting, I believe that it is the system that needs a major overhaul.

I thank you greatly for your time and the work you have put into this reform, I would also like this submission to remain confidential.

Thank you.

Michael White
MFB Firefighter

